

Q. What is the current financial condition of the county?

A. We are very blessed. We are able to pay our bills each month. We have not had to furlough or lay off any employees and we have not had to borrow money to operate with. Most would consider us to be in excellent financial condition.

Q. When most counties are having to furlough or lay off employees, how have we avoided that?

A. First, we have not replaced employees that have left, other than public safety. Second, we keep a handle on the number of employees we hire. Our employees have always picked up the slack when we have asked them and we are making do with what we have.

Q. I have heard you say several times that you are proud to have one of the lowest property tax rates in the state of Georgia? How are we able to maintain that?

A. It requires watching every dollar, keeping our employee count at a minimum, and having employees that are dedicated and willing to work hard for the citizens.

Q. What is our property tax rate?

A. Our property tax rate, expressed in terms of mil rate is 5.408 mils. Last year we were the 4th lowest in the state of Georgia out of 159 counties. It is too early to know our ranking this year as all counties have not turned theirs in yet, but we reduced ours from 5.410 mils last year and 5.419 mils the previous year. We have reduced property taxes by over \$ 150,000 in the last four years. That may not sound like a lot, but it is when you realize how much fuel, asphalt, parts and most other products we use have continued to go up in cost, and we continue to operate our new and improved facilities.

Q. How has the SPLOST sales tax helped keep our property taxes lower?

A. It is fairly simple. We spend about \$1 million dollars of SPLOST per year on roads and bridges, and if we did not have it, we would have no choice but to increase property taxes and the mil rate in order to maintain our roads in the condition they are currently in.

The same goes for Sheriff vehicles, fire engines and equipment, E-911 center upgrades that are required each year, not to even mention recreation and maintenance of Meeks Park and other county facilities, all predominately done with the one penny SPLOST sales tax collected for each dollar spent in the county.

Q. Do you keep the county informed of our financial condition?

A. That is certainly our intent. Unfortunately, if you do not read the North Georgia News each week, there is no way to keep up with what is going on in county government. Each week, through my Q & A column, my goal has been to keep everyone informed about what is going on in the county. We also publish the Q & A on our web site, www.unioncountyga.gov

Q. You mentioned in a previous column that we were going to pay for the new Community Center with the new SPLOST (IV), but I have never heard about that. I thought it was being paid for with this SPLOST (III).

A. It has probably been addressed in several other areas in the past, but three different times in my Q & A column I have addressed this issue directly; May 9, 2012, May 17, 2012, and August 15, 2012. All explained that we plan on paying for the Community Center with SPLOST IV Funds. This has always been part of our SPLOST IV budget.